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DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE

Security without Walls: The Organ Pipe Experience

South Central Arizona's Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, known for its fragile desert ecosystems and striking cactus formations, includes about 30 miles of the U.S. border with Mexico. With increased immigration enforcement activities in nearby Yuma, Arizona, illegal migrant traffic has been pushed further into Arizona's delicate Sonoran desert, leaving the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument directly in the path of both large number of illegal immigrants and sometimes damaging enforcement activities of the Border Patrol.

Vehicle Barriers Dramatically Reduce Immigrant Traffic

However, as of November, 2005, the National Park Service had constructed vehicle barriers along about 20 miles the border at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. Even with 10 miles still remaining, the Monument has seen a dramatic reduction in illegal vehicle enforcement incidents – vehicle border crossings.



Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument/Jenny Neeley



Organ Pipe Vehicle Barrier/Jenny Neeley

Department of the Interior records show that vehicle crossings have been reduced by over 525 percent in Organ Pipe. Similarly, in Coronado National Monument, which lies 150 miles to the East of Organ Pipe, the National Park Service has constructed vehicle barriers along almost half of the Monument's 3-mile border. Since then, only one illegal drive through has been reported.

The experiences at both Organ Pipe and Coronado show that fences are not always the answer in delicate protected lands.

America's Borders Contain Other Cherished Places and Habitats

The Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument model would work in other special places. America's border with Mexico includes national parks, forests, monuments, wildlife refuges, wilderness areas and other environmentally sensitive areas. Nearly a quarter of the 1,950 mile U.S. – Mexico border lies within public lands. This includes hundreds of miles within the National Park system alone, and runs through national treasures like the San Pedro National Riparian Conservation Area. Many National Wildlife Refuges are directly in the path of the House and Senate immigration bills' border wall provisions. Both bills would require the Border Patrol to build not only double or triple layered walls, but roads and other "barriers" within these critically important areas without having to consider or even disclose the potential impacts, let alone comply with federal laws intended to protect wildlife, clean water and air, or public safety.



Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge/Fish and Wildlife Service

Protected Lands along America's Southern Border

Big Bend National Park (TX)
Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge (AZ)
Coronado National Forest (AZ)
Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument (AZ)
Saguaro National Park (AZ)
San Pedro National Riparian Conservation Area (AZ)
Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge (AZ)
San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge (NM)
Lower Rio Grande National Wildlife Refuge (TX)

Wildlife Needs Access to Cross-Border Habitat for Migration

Many imperiled species depend upon borderland habitat for their continued existence. In Arizona alone, the Border Patrol estimates that 39 species protected or proposed to be protected under the Endangered Species Act are already being affected by its operations. Much of this country's most spectacular wildlife, including jaguars, bighorn sheep, and hundreds of bird species, depend upon protected public lands along U.S. borderlands for migration corridors between countries. A wall along the border with Mexico, for example, would impede the recovery of the critically endangered Sonoran pronghorn, with fewer than 75 individuals in the U.S., by further slicing up its already fragmented habitat, and have dramatic affects on countless migratory bird species and bird enthusiasts.